

# The Grenfell Association

For Aiding Philanthropic Work Among  
The Deep Sea Fishermen of Labrador



Wilfred T. Grenfell



Trap-Boat Fishermen



Battle Harbor Hospital



Off For The Doctor

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### The Deep Sea Fishermen of Labrador

*The following excerpts from various publications have been selected with the purpose of stating in a concise and authoritative form the facts concerning the origin, spirit and object of the work which Dr. Wilfred T. Grenfell is doing in Labrador, and which this association is aiding.*

### A BIT OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

By Wilfred T. Grenfell.

In 1883, while I was studying medicine at the London Hospital in Whitechapel, I was attracted by a huge crowd going into a large tent in the slums of Stepney. There was singing going on inside, and curiosity led me in.

As I left with the crowd, I came to the conclusion that my religious life was a humbug. I vowed in future that I would either give it up or make it real. It was obviously not a thing to be played with.\* \* \*

Some time later I heard that one of England's famous cricketers, whose athletic distinctions I greatly admired, Mr. J. E. K. Studd, was going to speak in the neighbourhood, and I went to hear him. Seated in front of me there were two or three rows of boys from a training-ship, all dressed in the same uniform. At the end of his speech Mr. Studd invited any one who was not ashamed to confess that Christ was his Master for this life, rather than a kind of insurance ticket for the next world, to stand up. I was both ashamed and surprised to find that I was afraid to stand up. I did not know I was afraid of anything. One boy out of all this large number rose to his feet. I knew pretty well what that meant for him, so I decided to back him up and do the same.

With this theological outfit, I started on my missionary career.

My medical course being finished, I began to cast about for some way in which I could satisfy the aspirations of a young medical man and combine it with a desire for adventure and definite Christian work. Sir Frederick Treves, the famous surgeon, also a daring sailor and master mariner, who had twice helped us at our camp, and for whom I had been doing the work of an "interne" at the London Hospital, suggested my seeing if a doctor could live at sea among the deep-sea fishermen on one of the vessels of the Society for which he was a member of the council.\* \* \*

Encouraged by results in 1892, I was loaned the largest of the sailing vessels, a craft of ninety-seven tons burden, in which we sailed to the Labrador coast to see whether among English-speaking fishermen of the Northwest Atlantic similar results might not be achieved.

In three months we had nine hundred patients, to whom we could thus commend our Gospel with pills and plasters, without fear of denominational interference, besides witnessing a condition of poverty to which we had been quite strangers over on the other side. Unable to do on the ship to those men as we would have them do unto us under similar circumstances, we called on the way home at St. John's, Newfoundland, and laid the matter before the merchants, asking for help to build a hospital on the land, and promising to bring out a doctor and nurse to live there if they built it.

We have now three hospitals on that desolate coast—not palaces for pain such as one sees in these great cities, but humble wood buildings where a qualified doctor and trained nurse reside, where besides their own rooms they have a dozen beds for sick people, a convalescent room, an operating room, and an isolation ward. These places are not only hospitals but hotels, places to which any one and every one is expected to come in sickness or any other kind of trouble whatever.

Here other methods of commanding our Gospel are also

open to us, owing to the extraordinary poverty and isolation of the people.

A universal system of truck business prevailed: the "catch" of to-morrow was mortgaged for the food of to-day. The people seldom or never saw cash. The inevitable results were poverty, thriftlessness, and eventually hopelessness. The contention of the trader was always that the men's poverty was because they did not catch enough to support themselves. The answer was that they got enough to support at least thirty traders.

We started a sermon with a co-operative store as a text. The people round it were all heavily in debt; most winters they received so much government relief to keep them from actual starvation that the place was known as "The Sink." The people were almost all illiterate and knew nothing about business, and the little store went through varying fortunes.

Looking at the results of the sermon seven years afterwards, I find the people clothed, fed, independent, with a new little church building, and children far-and-away better clad and educated. The movement has spread; there are now five co-operative stores, with a schooner called the "Co-operator" which carries their products to and from the markets. The price of flour has uniformly kept under \$5 a barrel; the price of salt has been reduced nearly 50 per cent., and other things in proportion.

One of our chief troubles with our people was the long enforced idleness of the winter and the consequent necessity of living largely on the summer "catch." This necessitated their remaining scattered on the chance of catching fur-bearing animals in the winter, even if the actual "catch," as was often the case, didn't amount to a barrel of flour for the whole time. This again prevented their children being reached for educational purposes. It was long a problem to us what ought to be done to meet the difficulty. Eventually, we took up a grant of timberland on which the Newfoundland Government permitted me special conditions, and we started to aggregate the people in winter by affording them remunerative work about the mill.

To this we have added a small schooner-building yard, and hope shortly to add a cooperage, as we use many barrels in the fish industry. We have gathered together about this small effort this winter some two hundred and fifty people. A small school-house has been erected, and those who are managing the mill know that this effort is their text from which they are to preach their sermon.

There can be no question that the Christ would to-day support all manly and innocent pastimes. So, to meet the needs of the long wintry evenings, we have commandeered the two small jails in our district and converted them into clubs, with a library and games, which have been supplemented by the importation of footballs made of rubber for service on the snow. This has become so popular that our Eskimo women join the game with their babies in their hoods, and seal-skin footballs stuffed with dry grass have sprung into existence all along the coast.

The toys which we usually credit Santa Claus with bringing from the north had hitherto been conspicuous by their absence, the supply perhaps being exhausted. Anyhow, the birthdays of the Labrador children, like the birthday of our Lord, have never been characterized by the joyful celebrations which formed oases in our own child life. We have turned the current of toys back to the north again. True, the dolls are often legless, the tops are dented, and the Noah's arks resemble hospitals. But these trifles have made the Christmas tree no less a message of the love of God on the birthday of the Saviour to these many birthdayless children who thus keep their own on that day.

#### AN OUTLINE HISTORY.

*From "The Outlook," July 18, 1903.*

1892—The hospital vessel *Albert* sailed from England with Dr. Grenfell in charge as the only Mission doctor. He spent three months on the coast, holding services and treating 900 sick folk.

1893—Battle Harbour Hospital was presented by friends in St. John's, Newfoundland, and opened during the

summer under a qualified nurse and doctor. The launch *Princess May* was added to enable the ship to do more work.

1894—Indian Harbor Hospital was opened for the summer, and for the first time Battle Harbor Hospital was kept open in winter. Friends in Canada began to help the Mission.

1895—The sailing hospital was replaced by the steamer *Sir Donald*, the gift of Sir Donald A. Smith, who has lived many years in Labrador. 1,900 sick folk received treatment. Dr. Roddick, of Montreal, presented the sailing boat *Urelia McKinnon* to the Mission.

1896—A small co-operative store was started at Red Bay, in the Straits of Belle Isle, to help the settlers escape the “truck system” of trade and the consequent loss of independence and thrift. This has since spread to a series of five, with very beneficial results to the very poorest. The *Sir Donald* was carried out from her harbor by the winter ice, and found far at sea, still frozen in, by the seal hunters. She had to be sold.

1897—The steam launch *Julia Sheridan*, given by a Toronto lady, replaced the *Sir Donald*. A large mission hall was attached to Indian Harbor Hospital for the use of the fishermen. 2,000 patients were treated.

1899—Largely through the munificence of the High Commissioner, the steel steam hospital *Strathcona* was built at Dartmouth, England, and fitted with every available modern appliance. At the request of the settlers, a doctor wintered in North Newfoundland.

1900—The *Strathcona* steamed out to Labrador. The settlers on the Newfoundland shore of the Straits of Belle Isle commenced a hospital at St. Anthony, and the Mission decided to adopt that place as a third station.

1901—The Newfoundland Government granted \$1,500 to stimulate the erection of St. Anthony Hospital.

A small co-operative lumber mill was started to help the settlers of the poorest district, who often faced semi-starvation, to get remunerative work in winter. The schooner *Co-operator* was purchased and rebuilt by the people to assist the co-operative store efforts.

1902—A new wing was added to Battle Harbor Hospital, with a fine convalescent room and a new operating room. Indian Harbor Hospital was also considerably enlarged. 2,774 patients received treatment—110 of these being in-patients in the little hospitals. The launch *Julia Sheridan* was chartered by the government, with one of the medical officers, to suppress an outbreak of smallpox.

1903—Some new outbuildings were added to the Indian Harbor Hospital, and a mortuary and store were built at Battle Harbor Hospital. The third and fourth co-operative stores were started at West St. Modiste and at Flowers Cove to encourage cash dealing and thrift. The *Princess May* went out of commission and was sold.

1904—A new doctor's house was built at Battle Harbor. The steam launch *Julia Sheridan* had to be sold. She was replaced by a 10 H. P. kerosene launch called by the same name. An orphanage was built at St. Anthony's Hospital to accommodate fifteen children. A building was also added for teaching loom work and general carpentering and lathe work.

1905—A doctor was appointed at the request of the people on the Canadian Labrador, with headquarters at Harrington, near Cape Whittle, on the north side of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The first schooners were built at the lumber mills, which is now flourishing, and helping to maintain some one hundred families. Two consulting surgeons from Boston Universities visited us during the summer to help in the work. Through the generosity of Mr. Andrew Carnegie, between thirty and forty small portable libraries

were distributed along the coast, containing from 50 to 100 books in each.

1906—Through the help of friends in Montreal and Toronto a new hospital and doctor's house were built at Harrington, and a second kerosene launch called the *Northern Messenger* was given for the work there. New dog sledges and teams were also given by the Montreal *Weekly Witness*. Some new buildings were erected at St. Anthony, including some small farm outbuildings, and some land taken up from the Newfoundland Government with a view to trying to introduce cattle.

1906-07—In connection with the co-operative store at Flowers Cove an industry of making seal skin boots has sprung up, and 1,500 pairs of boots were exported this summer. Around these small industries it is possible to aggregate women and children in the winter for the purpose of better education. A new wharf, with stores for clothing, coal, and a large mission room are being added to Battle Harbor. The old Executive Building will have to come down in 1907, as the accommodation is now altogether inadequate for the work that has to be done. It is hoped also this year that funds will be raised to commence the introduction of the domestic reindeer, to afford meat, milk, and better transportation. Several volunteers have joined the staff:—the lady in charge of the orphanage, an electrical engineer in charge of the general mechanical work, a teacher for night school and library work; while the fourth hospital was kept open all last summer by a volunteer doctor from Harvard University and volunteer nurses from England. A volunteer teacher of arts and crafts will be in charge of the industrial work at St. Anthony this year.

Somewhere off the coast of Labrador this time of the year there is a steamship called the *Strathcona* cruising about among the fishermen. In command of this vessel there is a young Englishman, an Oxford man, bronzed, athletic, who is not only a surgeon, a friend and pupil of Sir Frederick Treves, famous as surgeon to the King, but also a certified master mariner, a founder of a system of co-operative stores, an explorer, an agent of Lloyd's, the great maritime insurance institution, an author, whose book, "Vikings of To-day," is full of stirring anecdote and human feeling. This surgeon-mariner and unconventional missionary is Dr. Wilfred T. Grenfell, Superintendent of the Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen.

The inhabitants of Labrador subsist on "fish," which is the legally recognized term there for cod. During the summer the population more than doubles, for then is the fishing season. But whether it be summer or winter, the people suffer hardships of peculiar severity. In the first place, storm and snow, merciless ice and rocks unite in bringing disaster to ships at sea and settlements on land. In the second place, the isolation of the fisher settlements on a barren soil renders the fisher folk absolutely dependent upon the traders for supplies of food, so that it has been usual for next year's catch of fish to be mortgaged in advance in payment for this year's food. In the third place, the fishing fleets have been accompanied by vessels selling grog and pandering to worse vices than drunkenness. To the need occasioned by accident and disease Dr. Grenfell brings an answer with medicines and bandages, surgical instruments, physicians, nurses, hospitals, and a hospital ship. To the pauperism and destitution brought about by the abominable "truck system" Dr. Grenfell has brought relief by establishing co-operative stores. To the challenge thrown down by the grog vessels Dr. Grenfell has replied by supplying games, wholesome amusements, and the tobacco the fishermen demand, in vessels that are veritable, though unconventional, "mission ships."

*From "Dr. Grenfell's Parish."*

Dr. Grenfell is not a missionary of the familiar type; he is less a preacher than a physician, and not more a physician than a philanthropist with industrial inspiration, an organizer of the most sane and practical sort. Moreover, he is the devoted champion of the simple folk among whom he labours.

These folk inhabit some two thousand miles of what has been called by seamen "the worst coast in the world." What with fog, wind, reefs, and ice, navigation of those waters is a matter of extreme difficulty always, and often of hardship and dreadful danger. Nevertheless, in summer and winter, Dr. Grenfell manages to make his professional round—in summer by the little hospital ship *Strathcona*, in winter by means of dog-team and komatik.

The writer made a careful study of Dr. Grenfell's work; and he was not only persuaded of the desperate need of it, but convinced that it was being conducted in an extraordinarily efficient manner, and with the promise of much more than temporary effect. That work is deserving of every good man's support, in sympathy and in money. The man and the work are wholly to be trusted; the work is a man's work, and a man is doing it.

*From an open letter from Mr. Duncan.*

It is not the intention of the Grenfell Association to take the place of the support now furnished to Dr. Grenfell by the Home Society or by the other friends who have so generously contributed to his work in the past, but rather to supplement this by additional funds for the expansion and increased efficiency of the work.

Since Dr. Grenfell's visit in 1905, about \$25,000 has been raised on this side of the Atlantic. If this sum could be raised annually, it would enable Dr. Grenfell to maintain his work and extend it somewhat.

All those who desire to have a part in this work are requested:

- (1) To join the Grenfell Association (dues \$1.00 annually).

(2) To spread information about and promote interest in the work.

(3) To contribute to its maintenance either by subscription or donation.

\$1,500 will endow a cot permanently.

\$1,000 will meet the annual expenses of a hospital launch.

\$100 will buy and transport a reindeer.

\$50 will support a cot for one year.

\$7 will provide a ton of coal for the steamer.

Gifts of clothing in good repair, blankets, books and magazines for loan libraries, medical supplies, toys for children, lantern slides for teaching, will also be welcomed and may be addressed to Mrs. R. A. Daly, 259 Daly Ave.

Interesting descriptions of Dr. Grenfell's work are given in *Harper's Magazine* for December, 1904; *McClure's Magazine* for April, 1905; *The Harvest of the Sea, Vikings of To-Day, Off the Rocks*, by W. T. Grenfell; *Dr. Grenfell's Parish*, by Norman Duncan; *Putnam's Monthly* December, 1906. *Among the Deep Sea Fishers*, a quarterly magazine published in Toronto (44 Richmond St., West) by Miss J. Greenshields, (subscription, 50c.), is devoted entirely to the interest of the work.

All subscriptions for the Association and membership dues should be sent to Mr. George Burn, Chairman, Care of Bank of Ottawa, or to Mr. José A. Machado, Hon. Treasurer, 224 Wellington St.

## THE GRENFELL ASSOCIATION OF OTTAWA.

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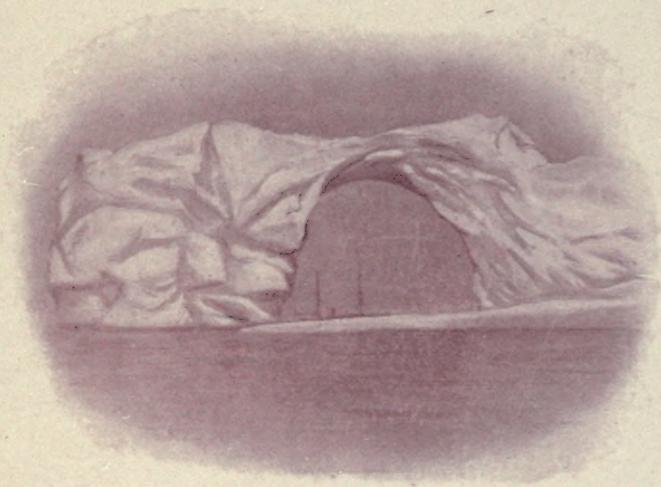
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With the desire of assisting Dr. Wilfred T. Grenfell, C.M.G., Superintendent of the Mission to the Deep Sea Fishermen, in his work in Labrador, the northern peninsula of Newfoundland, and Eastern Quebec, the above Committee are glad to endorse the splendid work that Dr. Grenfell is doing and to bespeak for it the practical help of the citizens of Ottawa.





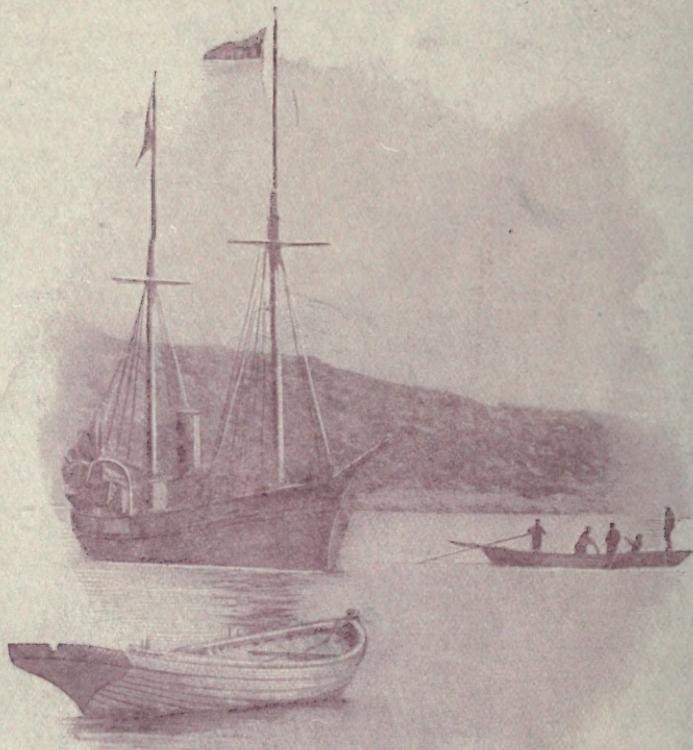
Rapid Transit in Labrador



The Strathcona in Company with an Iceberg



A Fisher Fleet



The Hospital Ship Strathcona